

THE ANCESTRY OF THE ELLIS FAMILY OF KIDDAL HALL IN THE
PARISH OF BARWICK-IN-ELMET IN THE WEST RIDING OF THE
COUNTY OF YORK

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ABSTRACT

This article is an investigation into the origins of a Yorkshire family and their arms. The family belonged to the upper band of the Yorkshire gentry, and produced two knights, namely Sir William Elys of Everingham (d.1391) and his brother Sir John Elys of Kiddal (d.1398).

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From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, sundry authors have written articles concerning this family which belonged to the upper band of the Yorkshire gentry, and was of knightly status (Giles, 1986, p.11). The family produced two knights, namely Sir William Elys, of Everingham, who died in October 1391, and his brother Sir John Elys, of Kiddal, who died in October 1398 (Colman, 1908; Ellis, 2004). Some of the information put forward in the earlier articles is entirely fanciful and manifestly absurd. The most accurate pedigree of the family appears to be that in Colman which carries it down to the late 19th century.

Earlier accounts of the Ellis family of Kiddal

The first account of the Kiddal family appears to be that by William Smith Ellis (1858a). Another article of his in the same volume (Ellis, 1858b) refers to the Ellis family arms. He informs us that his account of the Kiddal family (Ellis, 1858a) is compiled in the earlier part and in the historical portions from Burke's Landed Gentry (1850). Substantial research carried out by later authors shows that such an account is erroneous in the extreme and quite unacceptable.

W S Ellis began the pedigree thus: *'William Ellis, c.1218, assisted at the siege of Newark Castle, and served in the royal army against the Earl of Albermarle. The supposed son of this William, Sir Thomas Ellis, was slain about 1265, in a battle at Northampton. He was father of....'*

Waddington (1891) began the pedigree as follows (Fig.1):

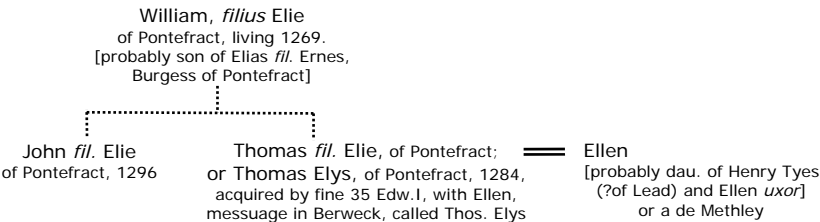


Fig. 1 The beginning of Waddington's version of the pedigree

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William son of Elias, shown in Fig.3 as bailiff of Pontefract c.1240, witnessed Charter 122 as "*Willelmo filio Helie*", Charters 135 and 153 as "*Willelmo filio Helye*", and Charter 169 as "*Willelmo filio Elye*". Unaspirated names were frequently aspirated in the thirteenth century.

Pontefract was the place where the family of Ellis of Kiddal originated and its members progressed from being merchants (probably in wool) to knightly status by the fourteenth century, having married into other families of that status, such as the de Vescys and the de Everingham.

Thomas son of Elys, Elias, Elie, Elye, or Thomas Elys of Pontefract.

Thomas Elye merchant of Pontefract occurs on the 24 September 1273³. In 1274 Thomas Elys, of Pontefract and William Russell were found to have unlawfully exported wool during the war with Flanders (the Hundred Rolls) (Colman, 1908, p.243 note 1). In the Patent Rolls, 1277-8, it is stated that John de Reigate and William de Northburgh were appointed to take the "*assise of novel disseisin*" arraigned by Thomas son of Elias de Pontefract and Elena his wife against Peter de Blakeholm and Emma his wife concerning a tenement in Berewick and Potterton. In 1305-6 there was a fine between John son of William de Methelay, plaintiff, Henry de Methelay and Thomas "*fil Elie de Pontefract et Elena ux. eius*" deforciant, concerning a messuage, 80 acres of land, 20 acres of wood, and appurtenances in Methelay and Rothwell, and in 1306-7 a fine was made by Thomas Elys and Elena his wife concerning a messuage and appurtenances in Berewyke (Colman, p.243).

Colman states (p.243) that A S Ellis thinks that Elias son of Ernis was father of William Fitz Elias and grandfather of the Thomas son of Elys, Elias, Elie, Elye or Thomas Elys, of Pontefract who married Elena de Vescy (see above). It seems reasonable to submit that if that had been the case, Thomas would have been described as "*Thomas son of William son of Elias*" and not "*Thomas son of Elias*", Thomas occurs from 1273 to 1306-7, and in the sundry transactions in which he was involved between those years, he was always described as "*Thomas son of Elias or Thomas Elys*", and never as "*Thomas son of William son of Elias*", or as "*Thomas son of William*".

The Ellis Arms and the de Vescy connection

Colman (p.261) states that the family's arms, Or, on a cross sable five crescents argent, first occur in an addition to a copy of a roll of arms of the time of Edward II (1307-1327)⁴, as the arms of Sir Henry Elys, but that the bearer has not been identified, and that the arms seem to be based on Or, a cross sable, a coat borne by the de Vescys. Vesci, John, Eustace and Sir William, banneret, (Hen. III Roll) bore Or, a cross sable (Foster, 1989, p.198).

It is clear that the family's arms were borne by the said grandson Thomas Elys of Pontefract and Barwick in 1370, and possibly before, and that they were based upon the de Vescy arms of his paternal grandmother Elena daughter of John de Vescy who had married his paternal grandfather by 1277/8 when (see above) they arraigned an assize of novel disseisin touching a tenement in Barwick and Potterton.

The *Visitations of the North* (Hunter Blair, 1932) state that Sir Henry Elys was of Yorkshire in the Great, Parliamentary, or Bannerets' Roll of Arms, c.1312. Wagner

³ CPR (1901). Vol.1, p.25.

⁴ Harleian Ms.4033

(1950, p.43) states that that roll was compiled between 1312 and 1314, and that execution was contemporary or nearly so. Foster (1989, p.73) cites that roll and the arms for Sir Henry Elys.

Conclusions

Chronologically, and referring to the pedigree compiled from the Chartulary of St John of Pontefract (Fig.3 above), A S Ellis was no doubt correct in thinking that, if Thomas Elys of Pontefract was descended from Elias son of Ernis, then Thomas must have had a father who was a son of Elias son of Ernis, and William son of Elias, bailiff of Pontefract seems a likely candidate for such a father, but the father of Thomas could perhaps have been another son of Elias son of Ernis, and called Elias, and, if that were so, the consistent description of Thomas as Thomas son of Elias would be satisfactorily explained.

Ernis, Elias son of Ernis, William son of Elias and Thomas son of Elias or Thomas Elys, all of Pontefract were, in all likelihood, substantial burgesses and property owners with holdings in Pontefract and elsewhere in addition to their holdings of land on the moors of Pontefract.

As Sir Henry Elys of Yorkshire bore the family arms c.1312, and as Thomas Elys, the grandfather of Thomas Elys of Pontefract and Barwick, had married Elena daughter of John de Vescy by 1277/8 (arms – Or, a cross sable), the Ellis arms of Or, on a cross sable five crescents argent, appear to have become established between 1277/8 and 1312 (see above), and well established when in 1370 Thomas Elys of Pontefract and Barwick bore them, with a mullet for difference of a third son.

There is, of course, the possibility that if Thomas Elys was the son of William son of Elias son of Ernis, he elected to take his grandfather's name (Elias) and not his father's name (William) as his surname. An exalted example of this is Owen Tudor (c.1400-1461), the founder of the Tudor dynasty, who married Catherine of Valois, the widow of Henry V. He was Owain ap Meredudd ap Tudur, but chose to take Tudor as his surname, rather than Meredith, his father's name (Chrimes, 1999, pp.5, 338). There are no doubt many examples of such elections.

Appendices

The Manor of Kiddal

This came into the possession of Sir John Elys about 1385, though there is no record to show exactly when, or from whom it was acquired, and it remained in the Ellis family for over four hundred years (Colman, 1908, p.239). The Hall was probably built by Sir John between 1385 and 1398 when he died (see above), having made his will as "of Kiddal". It was 550 square feet in area, and had a decorative roof with "*fluted rafters gracefully springing from embattled hammer heads or beams terminating with pendants*". (Giles, 1986, pp.11, 192).

Etymology

The name Ernis or Erneis (Latin erniseus, French Herneys, Hernais) was (according to Withycombe, 1959) common from the 11th to 13th Centuries and was probably Old German "Arnegis" (Withycombe, 1959, p.100).

The name Elias was on of the most popular Old Testament names in the Middle Ages. The English "Ellis" and French "Elie" were all common in England as testified by the surnames formed from them (e.g. Ellis, Elley) (Withycombe, p.93).

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⁵ Collected from Mr John Dixon's article in the *Reliquae Eboracenses* written about 1854; with Notes thereon by G W Waddington, and Extracts from the Ellis Notices, by the late W S Ellis, Esq., of the Inner Temple, and Hydecroft, Crawley, Sussex